

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA

NICHOLAS A. MCNEIL,)
)
Plaintiff,)
)
v.) 1:13CV666
)
JIM O'NEILL,)
)
Defendant(s).)

ORDER AND RECOMMENDATION
OF UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Plaintiff, Nicholas A. McNeil, a prisoner in Guilford County, North Carolina, submitted a pro se complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and requested permission to proceed *in forma pauperis* pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a). Plaintiff names Jim O'Neill, the District Attorney in Forsyth County, North Carolina, as the sole Defendant. He actually makes no allegation as to O'Neill personally, but claims that unidentified persons in O'Neill's office caused him to be held in jail awaiting trial for approximately the same amount of time as the longest possible sentence he faced if convicted of the crime with which he was charged. Plaintiff seeks damages for the time spent in jail.

Because Plaintiff is “a prisoner seek[ing] redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity,” this Court has an obligation to “review” this complaint. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). “On review, the court shall . . . dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint, if [it] – (1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim

upon which relief may be granted; or (2) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

Applicable to this case, a plaintiff “fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted,” 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1), when the complaint does not “contain sufficient *factual matter*, accepted as true, to ‘state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.’” Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (emphasis added) (internal citations omitted) (quoting Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). “Where a complaint pleads facts that are ‘merely consistent with’ a defendant’s liability, it ‘stops short of the line between possibility and plausibility of “entitlement to relief.”’” Id. (quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 557). This standard “demands more than an unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.” Id. In other words, “the tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions. Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” Id.¹ The Court may also anticipate affirmative defenses that clearly appear on the face of the complaint. Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr., 64 F.3d 951, 955 (4th Cir. 1995) (en banc); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70, 74 (4th Cir. 1983).

¹Although the Supreme Court has reiterated that “[a] document filed *pro se* is to be liberally construed and a *pro se* complaint, however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers,” Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007) (internal citations and quotation marks omitted), the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit has “not read Erickson to undermine Twombly’s requirement that a pleading contain more than labels and conclusions,” Giarratano v. Johnson, 521 F.3d 298, 304 n.5 (4th Cir. 2008) (internal quotation marks omitted) (applying Twombly standard in dismissing pro se complaint); accord Atherton v. District of Columbia Off. of Mayor, 567 F.3d 672, 681-82 (D.C. Cir. 2009) (“A *pro se* complaint . . . must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.’ But even a *pro se* complainant must plead ‘factual matter’ that permits the court to infer ‘more than the mere possibility of misconduct.’” (quoting Erickson, 551 U.S. at 94, and Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 697, respectively)).

The final ground for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(2) generally applies to situations in which doctrines established by the United States Constitution or at common law immunize governments and/or government personnel from liability for monetary damages. See, e.g., Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman, 465 U.S. 89 (1984) (discussing sovereign immunity of states and state officials under Eleventh Amendment); Pierson v. Ray, 386 U.S. 547 (1967) (describing interrelationship between 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and common-law immunity doctrines, such as judicial, legislative, and prosecutorial immunity). Cf. Allen v. Burke, 690 F.2d 376, 379 (4th Cir. 1982) (noting that, even where “damages are theoretically available under [certain] statutes . . . , in some cases, immunity doctrines and special defenses, available only to public officials, preclude or severely limit the damage remedy”).

For the reasons that follow, the Complaint should be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) because it fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted and because it seeks monetary damages from a defendant with immunity from such relief.

As an initial matter, Plaintiff may be attempting to undermine his conviction or sentence for breaking and entering a motor vehicle.² If so, Plaintiff is not permitted to do this without first showing that such conviction has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by Executive Order, declared invalid by a state tribunal, or, finally, called into question by a federal court through the issuance of a writ of habeas corpus. Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S.

² The Complaint alleges that Plaintiff was charged with breaking and entering a motor vehicle and that he was held in custody on that charge for 303 days before being released. It is not clear from the Complaint whether that charge was resolved or, if so, the nature of that resolution.

477 (1994). Plaintiff fails to do so and, therefore, dismissal is proper for this reason alone to the extent that Plaintiff's claim would call a conviction into question.

Even if not barred under Heck, Plaintiff's claim still fails because he names only a District Attorney as the Defendant. Prosecutors have absolute immunity for their participation in the judicial process. Buckley v. Fitzsimmons, 509 U.S. 259 (1993). Injunctive relief may not be barred by such immunity, but Plaintiff requests only damages, not any injunctive relief. Plaintiff's Complaint should be dismissed.

As a result, Plaintiff's request to proceed *in forma pauperis* should not be countenanced, with the exception that *in forma pauperis* status shall be granted for the sole purpose of entering this Order and Recommendation.

Plaintiff has submitted the Complaint for filing, however, and, notwithstanding the preceding determination, § 1915(b)(1) requires that he make an initial payment of \$4.00. Failure to comply with this Order will lead to dismissal of the complaint.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that *in forma pauperis* status be granted for the sole purpose of entering this Order and Recommendation.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that within twenty (20) days from the date of this Order Plaintiff make an initial filing fee payment of \$4.00.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Plaintiff's trust officer shall be directed to pay to the Clerk of this Court 20% of all deposits to his account starting with the month of September, 2013, and thereafter each time that the amount in the account exceeds \$10.00 until the \$400.00 filing fee has been paid.

If an inmate has been ordered to make Prison Litigation Reform Act payments in more than one action or appeal in the federal courts, the total amount collected for all cases cannot exceed 20 percent of the inmate's preceding monthly income or trust account balance, as calculated under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2).

IT IS RECOMMENDED that this action be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A for being frivolous or malicious or for failing to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, as well as for seeking monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.

This, the 20th day of August, 2013.

/s/ L. Patrick Auld
L. Patrick Auld
United States Magistrate Judge